

Information on Rabies



WHAT IS RABIES?

Rabies is a deadly viral infection which affects the central nervous system and is almost always fatal if **early treatment** is not initiated.

HOW IS RABIES TRANSMITTED?

The rabies virus is present in the saliva of an infected animal. It can be transmitted when saliva gets into a bite or scratch, by licking an open wound, or by mucus membrane exposure. In the United States skunks, bats, raccoons and foxes are the most common carriers of rabies. In Idaho, rabies has been found most often in bats. Unvaccinated pets like dogs, cats and ferrets can also transmit the virus.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HUMAN RABIES?

Early symptoms of rabies include fever, loss of appetite, nausea, headache and fatigue. Pain that develops at the site of the wound or bite can be a sign of rabies. Later symptoms can include hyperactivity, confusion, delirium, gagging or choking when trying to drink liquids, hyperventilation, paralysis and death.

HOW LONG BEFORE SYMPTOMS APPEAR?

Usually 4 to 6 weeks. The incubation period can be as little as a few days to a year or more.

If you are exposed to rabies it is critical that you begin post-exposure treatment as soon as possible. Once symptoms of rabies appear it is almost always too late to prevent death.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE BEEN BITTEN BY AN ANIMAL?

- ***Wash the wound*** thoroughly with soap and water!
- ***Contact your physician immediately*** to discuss rabies post-exposure treatment and tetanus immunization.
- If you suspect the animal has rabies, ***notify local animal control*** immediately. Do not try and catch the animal yourself.
- If the biting animal is caught it can be quarantined for observation, or euthanized to see if it has rabies. ***The brain of an animal must be intact to test for rabies.*** Do not shoot a potentially rabid animal in the head.

IS THERE A TREATMENT FOR RABIES?

If a person is exposed to rabies it is important to begin treatment as soon as possible. Rabies post-exposure prophylaxis includes administration of Human Rabies Immune Globulin (HRIG) along with 5 doses of rabies vaccine. HRIG and the first dose of vaccine are administered as soon as possible and at the same time, followed by subsequent doses of vaccine on days 3, 7, 14, and 28. ***The Health Department does not carry HRIG and does not provide rabies post-exposure prophylaxis.*** As a general rule, rabies post-exposure treatment is available through hospital emergency rooms.

HOW CAN THE RISK OF EXPOSURE TO RABIES BE REDUCED?

- Vaccinate domestic pets and keep their vaccinations up-to-date.
- Do not feed or handle wild animals such as skunks, raccoons, bats and foxes.
- Animals in the wild should be afraid of humans. Avoid contact with animals which act strangely or aggressively (e.g. nocturnal animals like skunks moving about in broad daylight).
- A Bat-proof[≡] homes, cabins, attics and other areas where bats might enter or nest.
- ***If you find a bat in a room with a person who has been sleeping, or a bat with an unattended child, a mentally disabled or intoxicated person, consult your doctor immediately even if there isn't any evidence of a bite or scratch.*** (*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Vol. 47, No. 1, January 16, 1998*).

If you have questions, please call your doctor or local health department.

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